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Tuesday, January 20, 2015
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John A. Scocos Column: Women Veterans in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, as a main part of its mission, focuses on outreach to veterans to inform them of the programs, benefits and services to which they are entitled. Among the nearly 400,000 veterans in Wisconsin are tens of thousands of women veterans who served from World War II to the present day. From the very founding of our nation, women have served and protected America and will continue to do so in ever increasing numbers.

As of 2011, women made up 14.5% of the active duty force. As more jobs traditionally restricted to men become open to women, that number may rise. Because we realize women veterans deserve strong representation in utilizing available benefits, but may be more reluctant than their male counterparts to embrace their status as veterans. For many years, the department has been reaching out to women veterans to serve their needs. This includes monitoring legislation of interest to women veterans and ensuring that women veterans receive the same benefits and services as men veterans that they are eligible for through their military service.

Women have played a critical role in our military history and this year during our Veterans Day ceremony at the State Capitol, we were honored to present Wisconsin veteran Jennifer Sluga the Wisconsin Woman Veteran of the Year, which recognizes women veterans who have compiled a record of superior service as a military service member, a veteran, and outstanding member of the community. Sluga served in the United States Army from 2004-2010. She is a veteran of the Kosovo campaign who has numerous military awards and decorations. She has assisted with several projects at the William S. Middleton Veterans Memorial Hospital including the Clothesline Project that helps victims of military sexual trauma, as well as facilitating several therapy groups.

Established in 2008, the Woman Veteran of the Year award has been given to an outstanding Wisconsin woman veteran covering service eras from WWII to current conflicts.

We are proud to recognize the efforts of all our Wisconsin men and women in uniform. Part of that recognition is our great Wisconsin Veterans Museum which tells the stories of our fellow citizens when they left home to serve. Please remember their service and sacrifice as you read their stories and learn about their military service.

(John A. Scocos is the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. He is an Iraq War veteran.)